

“Therefore Ye Are My Witnesses, Saith The Lord, That I Am God”

The “cosmic courtroom” scene that was set in Isaiah, chapter 40, continues throughout our current reading and forward. “Ye are my witnesses,” the Lord declares, “that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no savior. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God” (Isa. 43:10-12; 44:8).

We are His witnesses. This beautiful thread of witness is introduced in Isaiah 40, wherein the Lord’s servants are instructed to “speak comfortably to Jerusalem,” and to declare unto her people “Behold your God!” (Isa. 40:1, 9). The phrase reverberates with meaning, because so much of the knowledge of God has been repeatedly lost throughout the ages. Through Isaiah, the Lord clarifies His attributes, characteristics and power, so that His servants can correctly represent Him to the world. “To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?” God challenges (Isa. 40:25). “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa. 40:15).

How can God be described? Through Isaiah, the Lord describes Himself, and although He calls upon the isles of the sea, His children, and all of His creations to be His witnesses, we all fail to adequately comprehend the depth and breadth of what He has revealed. The following descriptions are taken from chapters 40-43 only:

- He administers justice (40:2)
- He forgives sins (40:2)
- He sends messengers to prepare the way before Him (40:3)
- The earth and planets move at His command, and work together to fulfill His plan (40:4)
- He will reveal His glory to all mankind (40:5)
- What He has spoken will most certainly come to pass (40:5)
- All flesh is as grass compared to Him (40:6-8)
- His word will stand forever (40:8)
- He wants His people to know Him (40:9)
- He rules with a strong arm and hand (40:10)
- His work is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man (40:10)
- He rewards the faithful (40:10)
- He is like a Shepherd, and will feed His flock, gather His lambs, carry the weak (40:11)
- He is the Creator (40:12)
- He needs no counsel (40:13-14)
- Nations come and go; He stands forever (40:15,17)
- All the offerings in the world are not sufficient to express what we owe to Him (40:16)
- He has revealed His work and Plan from the beginning (40:21)
- The inhabitants of the earth are as grasshoppers before Him; he stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (40:22)
- The princes and judges of the earth are as nothing before him (40:23)
- He decides who will obtain eternal life and salvation (40:24)
- He calls all of the hosts of heaven (and of the earth) by name (40:26)

- He faints not, does not grow weary, we cannot comprehend the depth of His understanding (40:28)
- He gives power to the faint; He increases our strength (40:29)
- Those that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, and mount up with wings as eagles; shall run and not be weary, walk and not faint (40:31)
- He raises up and calls forth righteous leaders, including the Messiah (41:2)
- He knows all of the generations from first to last (41:4)
- He has chosen Israel, and made covenants with Israel (41:8-9)
- He is with His people, He will help them, He will uphold them, and keep His covenants with them (41:10)
- He will fight against Israel's enemies (41:11-12, 43:3; 43:14; 43:17)
- He comforts His people (41:13)
- He is the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel (41:14)
- He will enable His covenant people to bring forth a great harvest of souls (41:15-16)
- He helps the poor and the needy; He provides Living Water; He will not forsake His people (41:17; 43:20)
- He will provide a promised land of abundance; rivers, fountains, springs of water (41:18)
- He will provide a promised land with every needful thing (41:19)
- He has shown and declared all that will happen (41:26)
- He calls forth the Messiah; he will bring judgment to the Gentiles (42:1)
- The Messiah will be gentle and humble in His mortal ministry (42:2)
- The Messiah will bring forth judgment unto truth (42:3)
- The Messiah will bring judgment and His law to the earth (42:4)
- He created the heavens and the earth; He gives breath to the people upon it, and His Spirit to those who walk therein (42:5)
- The Messiah will give light to the Gentiles and bring them into the covenant (42:6)
- The Messiah will open the eyes of the blind, release the prisoners from prison and from darkness (42:7)
- He tells His prophets and people what will happen before it comes to pass (42:9)
- He goes forth as a mighty man of war against His enemies; He roars (42:13)
- He will destroy and devour at once against His enemies (42:14)
- He will waste the mountains and the hills, dry up rivers at His command (42:15)
- He will lead the blind, and bring light into their darkness, He will make crooked things straight; He will never forsake His people (42:16,43:8)
- He gives His beloved covenant people into the hands of their enemies for recompense against their sins (42:24)
- He redeems His people; He keeps His covenants; He knows them by their names; He calls them by His own name (43:1)
- He will safely gather His people in one (43:2,5)
- He cherishes His covenant people (43:3-4)
- He has made and formed every person (43:7)
- He wants us to be His witnesses (43:9-12)
- He is the Lord the Holy One, the creator of Israel, our King (43:15)
- He opens the way before His people to return to their lands of promise (43:16, 19)
- Beasts and all animals honor Him (43:20)
- He has formed His people and brought them into covenant so that their works will bring Him praise (23:21)
- He blots out our transgressions; He will not remember our sins (43:25)

As we review these chapters, we cannot miss the seeming urgency with which the Lord shares these revelations: He wants us to know Him, and to testify of Him!

Following the description of the Messiah as recorded in Isaiah 42:1-8, it is no wonder that the Lord interjects the direction to “Sing unto the Lord a new song,” and to “praise [Him] from the end[s] of the earth” (Isaiah 42:10). How can we not feel our hearts swell with praise and song as we consider all that the Lord has revealed about Himself in these chapters?

The Old Testament Student Manual answers “What is the ‘New Song’?”

Isaiah recorded the singing of the ‘new song’ *after* he recorded the restoration of the gospel. The song is unique in that only those who are sanctified are worthy to sing it (compare Rev. 14:1-3). The same spirit is reflected in D&C 84:98-102). In another instance, the song is simply called the ‘song of the Lamb’ (D&C 133:56-57).

The Parry brothers add:

Singing a new song unto the Lord is mentioned ten times in the scriptures (see, for example, Ps. 40:3; 98:1; 149:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; D&C 84:98). Each time the song is one of praise. Such songs appear to be called *new* because they praise the Lord for *new* works of glory and blessing. The Lord commands the entire earth to sing a new song unto him (*Understanding Isaiah*, p. 363).

Beginning in verse 13 of chapter 42, the Lord reveals His plan to restore and gather Israel. Note the parallelism of 42:15 to 41:18, but with a reversal of the “watery” conditions. In one instance (41:18), He is providing water and wellsprings in the desert for His people, in the other (42:15), He is drying up waters in order to provide a highway for His people to cross upon and return.

The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man,
he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war:
he shall cry, yea, roar;
he shall prevail against his enemies.

I have long time holden my peace;
I have been still, and refrained myself:
now will I cry like a travailing woman;
I will destroy and devour at once.

I will make waste mountains and hills,
and dry up all their herbs;
and I will make the rivers islands,
and I will dry up the pools.

And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not;
I will lead them in paths that they have not known:
I will make darkness light before them,
and crooked things straight.
These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them (Isa. 42:13-16).

The Lord declares that He has “held His peace” and “refrained Himself,” presumably in the context of watching His people be scattered and lost in the darkness of apostasy. But, when He begins His work, He will “roar” to make His voice heard, as like a woman birthing a child, He brings about the birth of the Restoration. That work of the Restoration will be a “path” that the scattered flocks of Israel will not have considered before, “a way that they knew not.” For those who have been lost, the Restoration of the Gospel will be like light in darkness, giving sight to the blind. Even as Isaiah had earlier prophesied that the Book of Mormon would cause those that “erred in spirit [to] come to understanding” (Isa. 29:24), so the Gospel of Jesus Christ makes “crooked things straight.”

The *Old Testament Student Manual* explains 42:9-16:

The prophet Isaiah introduced the vision of the restoration of the gospel in the latter days by explaining that the truths and the keys of former days were to be restored. He also observed the restoration of new keys in the dispensation of the fulness of times (see v. 9). Using the metaphor of childbirth he described the restoration of the earthly kingdom following a long period of apostasy, during which the heavens had been sealed (see v. 14; compare Rev. 12:1-2, 13, 17). The Church will be restored in the last days, before the destruction that will make the mountains as plains and dry up the waters, and before the return of the scattered tribes of Israel, when they will come on paths they have not known, and the light of the gospel will dispel the darkness they have so long endured (see Isa. 42:15-16). Isaiah reiterated the Lord’s promise that the restored gospel would not be taken again from the earth and that the Lord will not forsake His own (see v. 16; compare Isa. 2:2-3; 11:11-16; 29:14-15, 18-19; Dan. 2:44-45; Joel 2:25-29).

Joseph Smith made needed corrections to the verses that follow. JST Isaiah 42:19-23 reads:

For I will send my servant unto you who are blind;
yea a messenger to open the eyes of the blind,
and unstop the ears of the deaf;

And they shall be made perfect notwithstanding their blindness,
if they will hearken unto the messenger,
the Lord’s servant.

Thou art a people, seeing many things, but thou observest not;
opening the ears to hear, but thou hearest not.

The Lord is not well pleased with such a people,
but for his righteousness’ sake he will magnify the law and make it honorable.

Thou art a people robbed and spoiled;
thine enemies, all of them, have snared thee in holes,
and they have hid thee in prison houses;
they have taken thee for a prey, and none delivereth;
for a spoil, and none saith, Restore.

The *Old Testament Student Manual* asks “Are the Servants of the Lord Blind?”

Isaiah was caught up in the majesty of his latter-day prophecy; however, at this point he digressed to expound upon the status of Israel between the day of his prophecy and the day of its fulfillment. He gave a clear reminder that all those, including wayward Israel, who pay homage at the feet of idols are deaf and blind to the message and light of the gospel (see vv 17-18).

The children of Israel have been a “people robbed and spoiled” on many levels, temporal and spiritual. The Lord’s restoration of Israel will take place in all realms, as they are gathered and healed physically and spiritually. An essential part of that healing is the Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Without it, we are blind, deaf, and imprisoned by false beliefs.

Who among you will give ear to this? who will hearken and hear for the time to come?

Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?
did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned?
for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law.

Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle:
and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not;
and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart (Isa. 42:23-25).

But now thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob,
and he that formed thee, O Israel,
Fear not: for I have redeemed thee,
I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee;
and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee:
when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned;
neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior;
I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee.

Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee:
therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life (Isa. 42:24-43:4).

These verses are full of covenant-imagery, beginning with the use of the names *Jacob* and *Israel*. Jacob, father of twelve sons, had his name changed to Israel by the Lord as part of the covenant-making process (see Gen. 32). Jacob’s sons became the fathers of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. By using the names Jacob and Israel in succession, the Lord is reminding His children that they have been called into covenant. This is particularly emphasized in the statement: “I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.”

There is a poignancy in the parallel verses concerning Jacob/Israel passing through “waters” and “fire” (see 42:25 and 43:2): in 42:25, the Lord laments the fact that Jacob/Israel is surrounded by fire, burned, “yet knew it not . . . [and] laid it not to heart.” As is typical of Isaiah,

these verses have temporal and spiritual application. The images of water and fire symbolize the covenants of baptism and of receiving the Holy Ghost, in which case, Israel was initially unaffected and “laid it not to heart,” but in latter-days, and during the Restoration, the Lord will take them through the “waters and fire” again, leading them by the hand.

On another level, when the “fire” of chastisement came “and burned [them],” the children of Israel did not understand or recognize that it was in consequence of their broken covenants. “He knew not, and laid it not to heart.” These trials and difficulties did not change their hearts towards God, who nevertheless, in 43:2 states that through His protection and love, even when Israel “walks through the fire, [they] shall not be burned.” Because He has loved them, and entered into covenant with them, He has given “Egypt [as a] ransom” for Israel, and “men and people” for the life of Israel.

The statements about Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba have fulfillment on various timelines, as well. The great Passover commemoration reminds Israel that the Lord slew all of the firstborn sons of Egypt (human and animal) in order to ensure Israel’s deliverance. In Isaiah’s own time period, the Lord was promising that He was going to gift the land of Egypt (Ethiopia and Seba included) to King Cyrus in return for allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem. It remains to be seen if this prophecy will again be fulfilled in the future, as is likely.

Undergirding all is the Lord’s declaration of abiding love. He sets the example for us in steadfastness and forgiveness. While in these verses, He states that He has given Egypt and “men” for the ransom of Israel, in fact, He has given His own life, and has “bought [us] with the price” of His blood (see 1 Cor. 6:20).

Fear not: for I am with thee:
I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west;

I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back:
bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth (Isa. 43:5-6).

Sometimes women feel that they are left out of the scriptures. This inclusion of “sons and daughters” illustrates the keen awareness that God has for both, and in this particular context, it is strongly implied that He has counted every individual.

Even every one that is called by my name:
for I have created him for my glory,
I have formed him; yea, I have made him (Isa. 43:7).

This is one of the main purposes for which we have been created: to bring glory and honor to the name of the Lord. We participate in that goal when we turn others to the Lord, and when our works are in accordance with His example. Even as the Savior gave glory to His Father (3 Ne. 13:13), so we give glory to the Father and to the Son as we follow in Their footsteps.

Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.

Let all the nations be gathered together and let the people be assembled:
who among them can declare this, and show us former things?
let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified:

or let them hear, and say It is truth.

Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen:
that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he:
before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me.

I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no savior.

I have declared, and have saved, and I have showed,
when there was no strange god among you:
therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God (Isa. 43:8-12).

Once again, we are brought into the witness stand of the cosmic courtroom setting. Even the blind (who have eyes) and the deaf (that have ears) will bow the knee when the Savior comes again (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11), and will not be able to deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Lord, and the Redeemer. One of the main points of evidence that the Lord brings to the trial is the fact that He has told all from the beginning; He has sent His prophets to testify and to warn and to prepare. "Ye are my witnesses," He tells His covenant people, and so we must be, and add our voices to those of the prophets in bearing testimony of Jesus Christ and the Plan of Salvation.

Yea, before the day was I am he;
and there is none that can deliver out of my hand
I will work, and who shall let it? [turn it back]

Thus saith the Lord, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel;
For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles,
and the Chaldeans, whose cry is in the ships.

I am the Lord, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King.

Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters;

Which bringeth forth the chariot and the horse, the army and the power;
they shall lie down together,
they shall not rise:
they are extinct,
they are quenched as tow.

Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.

Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it?
I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

The beast of the field shall honor me, the dragons and the owls:
because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my people, my chosen.

This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise (Isa. 43:13-20).

By His commandment, all Israel commemorated the deliverance from Egypt brought about by the miraculous hand of the Lord. In that deliverance, a “way in the sea” was made for Israel to cross through safely, while “the chariot and the horse and the army” of Egypt was drowned. All can look back on that event as a witness of God’s love and leadership for His people.

The Lord reminds us of that event, while pointing forward to a future deliverance from Babylon, even when the conquest had not yet taken place. It is as if He is saying: “Even as I delivered you from Egypt, I will yet deliver you from Babylon.” What a promise of comfort this should have been to His people as they were carried forth into captivity! Indeed, in accordance with Jeremiah’s prophecy that Israel would be captive in Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 29:1-14), and with Isaiah’s prophecy that the gentile King Cyrus would release them to return home to Jerusalem (Isa. 45), all was accomplished according to the word of the Lord.

Yet, the Lord prophesies, even these miracles of “old” will no longer be considered or remembered as compared to the “new thing” He will do in the latter-day gathering and restoration of Israel. He will perform His work, and none can turn Him back; His prophesying of it before it occurs is a witness of His omniscience as the God of the Universe.

Jeremiah added his own witness to this prophecy of the Lord’s great latter-day work:

Therefore, behold the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said,
The Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;

But the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from the north,
and from all the lands whither had had driven them:
and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers (Jer. 16:14-15).

Even as He provided water and food in the wilderness in the first exodus of Israel, so He will yet again provide nourishment in the wilderness for His people as they take the paths home to their promised land(s). These miraculous events will “show forth [His] praise,” as His children turn their whole hearts to Him and trust in Him as their only Savior and Redeemer.

In the immediate meantime, however, the Lord lamented:

But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob; but thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.

Thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt offerings;
neither hast thou honored me with thy sacrifices.
I have not caused thee to serve with an offering,
nor wearied thee with incense.

Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money,
neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices;
but thou hast made me to serve with thy sins,
thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities (Isa. 43:22-24).

Note the emphasis on the word “weary” in these verses. While the Lord has not wearied in caring for Israel, Israel has wearied in following the Lord. The Psalmist proclaimed: “Behold he that kept Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep,” (Ps. 121:4), yet Israel had closed her eyes and

ears against her Lord. While the Lord considered his covenant relationship with Israel to be a marriage (see Jer. 3:14), the “bride” turned her eyes elsewhere, her heart far removed from God.

I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake,
and will not remember thy sins.

Put me in remembrance:
let us plead together:
declare thou, that thou mayest be justified.

Thy first father hath sinned, and thy teachers have transgressed against me.

Therefore I have profaned the princes of the sanctuary,
and have given Jacob to the curse, and Israel to reproaches (Isa. 43:2-28).

Here, we return to the theme and phrasing introduced in Isaiah 42:24; Israel, the Beloved of the Lord, is let into the hands of her enemies because she has turned away from her covenant with the Lord. Yet, He promises, He will “blot out [her] transgressions for [His] own sake,” if she will remember Him, and confess and repent. The Lord acknowledges that the parents and leaders of the people have led them astray by their example, yet, if we return to the example of Abraham, the “Father of the Faithful,” we will see that despite the idolatry of his own father, Abraham sought for truth, and entered into his own covenants with the Lord. Abraham was a “follower of righteousness,” despite the poor example of his own immediate family (see Abr. 1:2). Like Abraham, despite our circumstances, we can choose to follow the example of righteousness, and of covenant-making, and covenant-keeping.

The courtroom scene will continue in our next week’s reading, where as promised, the Lord foretells that which only God could know: He will call a gentile king by his given name more than 100 years before his birth. “Ye are my witnesses,” He reminds us, that only He is God. King Cyrus, who had never before known the God of Israel, will add his own witness, as he reads about the prophecy, and will do as God commands. We are formed for “His glory,” and to show forth “His praise,” He reminds us through the prophet Isaiah. May we seek to act according to His will, and be His witnesses of truth, as we look forward to His coming, and help to prepare the world for that great event!